New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1948

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS — NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES — NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK SUN — NEW YORK STAR — NEW YORK POST

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"Where's Charley?"

New York Post

OCTOBER 12, 1948

Ray Bolger Tries Nobly In 'Where's Charley?'

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Ray Bolger, as every one knows, is one of the great men of the American theatre; a superb dancer, a superior comedian and an ingratiating personality. The idea of seeing him frolicking about in the garb of an ancient matron in a musical version of that undying British antique, "Charley's Aunt," was so profusely promising that all of us gathered last night at the St. James Theatre in the virtual certainty of seeing something delightful. We saw Mr. Bolger in his customary fine form, and that is always a treat, but I found his surroundings strangely dreary.

Although the star was the chief reason for high expectations about "Where's Charley?" there were other causes for optimism. The music, for example, was by Frank Loesser, who wrote such popular songs as "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," "Spring Will Be a Little Late This Year" and "They're Either Too Old or Too Young" during the war years, and was here offering his long-anticipated complete score for a musical comedy. Then there was the expert George Abbott, who is famous for his staging of both farces and musical shows.

Music and Book

All of them, save Mr. Bolger, proved sorely disappointing in their contributions. Mr. Loesser's score has several pleasant numbers, but it is, in general, both commonplace and unexhilarating, and it lacks the touch that had been expected of him. Nor did Mr. Abbott turn out the expert job of comic adaptation and inventive staging for which he has shown such talent in the past. The result is that "Where's Charley?" lacked the zest, humor, style and high spirits that might have made it worthy of its star's valiant striving.

The odd thing is that "Charley's Aunt" is, in its primitive sort of way, a lively and entertaining farce, when it is acted and directed with the required imagination. When Jose Ferrer played it in 1940, under Joshua Logan's direction, every one was astonished to discover that this presumably doddering old play still had a lot of fun in it, and it turned out to be one of the hits of the season. Last night, with music, dancing and chorus girls added, all the humor seemed to have been drained from it.

Allyn McLerie

The scenery and costumes that David Ffolkes designed for it are bright and attractive, the chorus is good-looking and spirited, and, when Mr. Bolger dances, magic is present. But little else worked out. There was a desultory air to the evening's proceedings. Things brightened when Allyn McLerie, the heroine, sang a song in which she tried to persuade herself that Charley was not deceiving her, but such moments were infrequent. For most of the time, everybody sat around and waited for Mr. Bolger to go into his dance.

I have perhaps said enough to suggest that I am among his admirers. He has an effortless, likeable comic sense about him, and his dancing is a happy combination of humor, informality and a strange kind of grace and beauty. The season always looks better when he is appearing on Broadway. "Where's Charley?" sounded in advance as if it would be an almost ideal vehicle for him. Instead, it is a routine and spiritless effort, for all of its fine promises.

'WHERE'S CHARLEY.'

Musical comedy based on Brandon Thomas's "Charley's Aunt"; book by George Abbott; words and music by Frank Loesser; dances directed by George Balanchine, assisted by Fred Danielli; vocal arrangements and direction by Gerry Delf; settings and costumes by David Ffolkes; orchestrations by Ted Royal, Hans Spialek and Phil Lang; musical director, Max Goberman; production directed by George Abbott; presented by Cy Feuer and Ernest H. Martin in association with Gwen Rickard, at the St. James Theatre, Monday evening, October 11, 1948. The cast:

Brassett	John Lynds
Jack Cheney	Byron Palmer
Charley Wykeham	Ray Bolger
Kitty Verdun	Doretta Morrow
Amy Spettigue	Allyn Ann McLerie
Wilkinson	Edgar Kent
Sir Francis Chesney	Paul England
Mr. Spettigue	Horace Cooper
A Professor	Jack Friend
Donna Lucia d'Alvadorez	Jane Lawrence
Photographer	James Lane
Patricia	Marie Foster
Reggie	Douglas Deane

The New York Times

OCTOBER 12, 1948

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Ray Bolger is not the greatest man in the world. But why quibble? In "Where's Charley?", which was put on at the St. James last evening, he is great enough to make a mediocre musical show seem throughly enjoyable. An eminent hoofer of the bucolic breed, he pushes the show aside now and then to spin rhapsodically through his mocking dances, grinning like a country gawk and translating love into leaps, whirls and comic staggers.

He can sing, which seems like an extra dispensation. In company with Allyn McLerie he turns the antiphonal "Make a Miracle" into an original and whimsically-humorous piece of music. Ever since "By Jupiter," Mr. Bolger has also been a first-rate character comedian. Give him an impish part, and he can broaden it into something very much worth guffawing at. An amiable fellow with a chinless profile, skittish feet and a snickering spirit, Ray is a valuable man in this neighborhood and a marvelously festive companion.

* * *

To avoid book trouble, the manufacturers of "Where's Charley?" have adapted that old British warhorse, Brandon Thomas' "Charley's Aunt," which is up to the withers in plot. Even with a musical background it is a pretty stupid plot. If Mr. Bolger were not a master of levitation, he could never kick his dancing pumps loose from it. But he has some good people on his side—George Abbott, the old bandmaster for college musical shows; David Ffolkes, who has designed spacious and cheerful settings as well as costumes of extraordinary loveliness, and George Balanchine, the aristocrat of the theatre ballet.

As the music-master, "Where's Charley?" offers Frank Loesser, who is a very interesting composer. Mr. Loesser is a song-writer celebrated for "Rodger Young," the most stirring war ballad, and "Jingle, Jangle, Jingle," which jongled the juke-boxes across the world a few years ago. For "Where's Charley?" he has scribbled off a lively score in a number of entertaining styles—Gilbert and Sullivan pastiche for the beginning, a marching song complete with umph-umph out of a French horn, a comic choral for for some female gossips and standard romances in a pleasantly sentimental vein. Mr. Loesser combines song-writing with composing, which is a most acceptable notion.

Having an ear as well as an eye, Mr. Abbott has hired an attractive cast. As the very proper young ladies, Doretta Morrow and Miss McLerie are not at all hard to look at, and they are accomplished singers. As Charley's authenticated aunt, Jane Lawrence has the manners of a lady and the voice of a music-stage artist; and Byron Palmer is not only a good baritone but a good fellow, who can sing "My Darling, My Darling" without appearing to be absolutely foolish.

* * *

Although the ballets are cultivated, you can enjoy them—particularly the stylized band parade and the cotillion drenched with splendor in the last act. The exotic "Pernambuco" that concludes the first act is too austere to introduce Mr. Bolger's satiric flourishes. "Where's Charley?" is a conventional music-show that has been well staged by a man who believes in organization and tempo. Mr. Bolger skips impishly through it like a rustic caricature with winged feet. Sometimes he bounces clear across that rusty plot. "Where's Charley?" is a rhetorical question. Where's Bolger? is more to the point. Fortunately, he is all here at the moment, and in fine fettle, too.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 12, 1948

Main Query in 'Where's Charley?' Is Where's Bolger?—He's There!

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Except when he is leering confidingly at an audience or laughing at himself in a mirror, Ray Bolger's face has the look of someone who has just sucked a lemon for the first time in his life. He is tall and stooped and narrow. His limbs are not very well riveted to his frame, like those of a cardboard Hallowe'en skeleton. He is therefore perfectly endowed by nature to be the best dancing comedian in our theatre—and he is just that.

Lucky he is, too, for the new musical, "Where's Charley?" would not be as engaging as it is without him.

"Where's Charley?" came to the St. James Theatre last evening with a book by George Abbott and songs by Frank Loesser. It is based on Brandon Thomas' "Charley's Aunt," the ruggedest and soundest farce of the last half century. It should be a natural for musical comedy adaptation—but in performance it is on the slow side when Ray isn't around.

Fortunately, Bolger is present except for moments needed to catch his breath or change from his Oxford student rig to the garb of his South American aunt. (This change, by the way, is excellent;

in black lace and mittens he looks a perfect old fright.)

Miss McLerie a Help.

Fortunately, too, Mr. B. has an assist now and then from Allyn McLerie as the girl who is in love with Bolger, the collegian. Miss McLerie has a prim and solemn face, a very proper way of speaking, the ability of a good straight comedienne—and she can dance and sing. She is not new to Broadway, but this is her best role and she is on her way up in show business.

High spot for me is Bolger's solo number, "Once in Love With Amy," in which his dancing ranges from the finest of soft-shoe work to the most exuberant high-stepping. Those limbs, which seem so precariously attached, are like watch-spring steel—tireless. Another moment of real comedy is when he is, in the aunt's masquerade, spending time with some partially clad lovelies in the ladies' dressing room. Noting that the girls are always regarding themselves in the pier glass, he figures he should, too—and busts out laughing.

A Lot of Plot.

I'm not sure just what is wrong with "Charley's Aunt" as a formula for a musical, but I think it is the need for explaining the motives and small villainies of Mr. Spettigue and Sir Francis Chesney. There is a lot of stuff about wards and wills and objections to marriage which requires other people taking stage center once in a while without marked effect. W. S. Gilbert fitted his plots about wards and guardians into musical formulas more deftly.

Mr. Loesser's score is pleasant. Besides Bolger's song about Amy, he has written a number sung by Byron Palmer and Doretta Morrow, "My Darling, My Darling," which sounds just like the words and should therefore be a hit. And for a second-act opening chorus his "Where's Charley" has zing. (And the zing of this chorus serves as a reminder that the end of the first act, which begins as a big Brazilian dance number, dwindles gently into nothing. It's a nice number staged by George Balanchine, but it is fantasy not connected with the plot. In a musical I think it is wisest to advise the customers that a plot is at its thickest just before intermission, for this is the best way of getting them to come back in.)

David Ffolkes' costumes and the girls in them are pretty. Jane Lawrence is charming as Charley's real aunt. Horace Cooper is fairly amusing as Mr. Spettigue, and the same can be said for Paul England as Sir Francis Chesney.

***NEW YORK* STAR**

OCTOBER 13, 1948

by John Lardner

An Old Ritual Plus Ray Bolger

Age and success have made a sort of ducal institution out of *Charley's Aunt*—so much so that the heirs of Brandon Thomas, who wrote the thing back in the 1890's, now part their name in the middle with a hyphen (Brandon-Thomas), while George Abbott, a ruggedly independent fellow as a rule, follows its plot with simple faith and humility in the book of *Where's Charley?*, a musical comedy which opened Monday night at the St. James.

What has been added to the old ritual, in the case of *Where's Charley?*, is Ray Bolger. Since Mr. Bolger is a pretty high-caste institution himself, and the chief excuse for dredging up Charley at this point, it should be said right away that he makes quite a difference, with his shimmering anatomy and his educated feet and all. Quite a difference, but not enough. Whenever he rests his dogs, you get another unadulterated portion of the plot of *Charley's Aunt*, served up on the family plate by the over-respectful Mr. Abbott.

There was a piece in the papers the other day by Maxwell Anderson, the first man to prove, by Darwinian methods, that the dramatic critic is identical with the typhus-bearing body louse (*Pediculus corporis*). After deploring the hardship and agony spread among playwrights by critics, Mr. Anderson asserted that in the long run it is public acclaim that establishes artistic merit and shows up the critic for the squalid bacillus-wagon that he is.

Well, by those standards, and by the Winchell-*Variety* boxoffice test, *Charley's Aunt* is a work of art of the first order, and has been for years, which makes a bum out of me when I say that I do not like it much better than *Forever Amber*, *The Girl of the Limberlost*, or *Yes, We Have No Bananas*, which were also popular masterpieces.

* * *

Luckily, there is little chance that I can paralyze the new variation, *Where's Charley?*, with what Mr. Anderson calls Critics' Blight, or financial ruin, since it is said to have an advance sale of a quarter of a million cocoanuts.

As in the original, the mainspring of the plot of *Where's Charley?* is a female impersonation palmed off upon society by a couple of Oxford students with the object of getting themselves married to a couple of debutantes. While I am under scientific influences, I would like to state my own theory of the art of female impersonation, which *I* consider to be divided roughly as follows:

(a) The athletic, or college-show, type of female impersonation,

(b) The anatomical, or evil-wink, type of female impersonation.

The only exponent of the latter style who was ever faintly tolerable was (b1) Mae West, who, though her art was basically that of the female impersonator, happened to be female to begin with, which made her a shade more palatable than the average in her trade.

Where's Charley? belongs to type (a) of female impersonations, and therefore approaches the alkaline side as far as good taste goes. Mr. Bolger, the impersonator of his own aunt from Brazil, is gruff, athletic, and unstuffed fore and aft. Fortunately, in his major dance numbers, like the one called *Once in Love with Amy*, in which he wraps up the whole art of comic dancing in one big package, he does his stuff in male attire. Fortunately, too, there is a bona fide girl of exceptional calibre on the premises in the person of Allyn McLerie, as a poker-faced ingenue, as a good light comedy singer, and as a warm and graceful dancer.

Most of the other performers are handcuffed to the Abbott-Brandon-Thomas plot, which abounds, as you probably know, in subsidiary love matches, letters that solve everything, and people in cutaway coats and gray hats named Chesney and Spettigue.

Frank Loesser, a song-writer who has knocked 'em dead with juke numbers like *Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition* and *I Got Spurs That Jingle, Jangle, Jingle*, leaves you slightly more conscious with his gentle score for this show. Mr. Abbott does add one thing to the standard *Charley*: a Brazilian dance number which would be heavily salacious but for the fact that Mr. Bolger has a funny face.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 12, 1948

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Here's Bolger

THE irrepressible Ray Bolger romps through "Where's Charley?" at the St. James Theater, which is indeed a blessing. On the whole this musical version of the venerable Brandon Thomas farce, "Charley's Aunt," is a heavy-handed and witless entertainment. The sturdy slapstick of the '90s is rarely funny in George Abbott's libretto, while the Frank Loesser songs do little to compensate for the loss of laughter. There are one or two fetching dance ensembles arranged by George Balanchine, to be sure, and agreeable trappings by David Ffolkes. But without Bolger, giving it the soft shoe and clowning triumphantly, the show would be exceedingly trying.

* * *

The star is seldom nonplussed by a bad book and Abbott's lumbering direction. As the Oxford undergraduate who pretends to be his aunt from Brazil in order to snatch his lady love from an irksome guardianship, he does everything but turn cartwheels. On occasion he gives the impression that he is falling back on sheer improvisation. In any case, his performing is immaculate and delightful, even when he is being chased around the stage in a wig and bustle, or witnstanding the advances of his sweetheart's miserly uncle. Like Jose Ferrer, in the straight revival of eight years ago, Bolger keeps any hint of vulgarity out of the female impersonation scenes, playing them as an accomplished farceur. In addition, he dances superbly.

Abbott has taken no great liberties with the original in making it the background for songs and dances. It is merely that he has lost the exuberance and low-down comedy which has kept it blooming for half a century. When he has to resort to unimaginative business in the tea party scene, even Bolger has a hard time in making the proceedings intermittently antic. The plot creaks badly in this adaptation and it is not helped in the pacing of the action. Balanchine's "Pernambuco" interlude at the end of the first act in a scene called "Where the Nuts Come From!" or his cotillion finale are welcome breaks in a dreary exposition. Bolger's solo, "Once in Love With Amy," has almost nothing to do with the exposition, but it is one of the high points in the offering.

The Loesser songs are handled for the most part by Byron Palmer, Allyn McLerie and Doetta Morrow. One might wish that they sang better and had better pieces to sing. Loesser has a fairish tune in "Make a Miracle" and a good march, but his is not an imaginative score. Palmer is more straightforward than artful as Charley's chum; Miss McLerie is at her best when she is dancing with the star and Miss Morrow helps out in several duets. Then there are Paul England, playing Sir Francis Chesney quietly, Jane Lawrence making a handsome Donna Lucia d'Alvadorez, and Horace Cooper portraying the uncle. The ingredients are present for a gay period musical in "Where's Charley?" but Bolger alone makes them evident.

The Sun

OCTOBER 12, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Ray Bolger . . . Very Little Else.

The venerable and indestructible comedy known as "Charley's Aunt," which has been in the American theater since the Cleveland administration, now turns up as a show with songs and dances under the title of "Where's Charley?" and I can't advise you to go hurtling today toward the St. James Theater. The first performance was given in that playhouse last evening.

"Charley's Aunt" was all about the gay undergraduate life at Oxford and of the hilarity brought about when one of the students, to meet an emergency, puts on women's clothes and poses as his aunt from Brazil. But most of the fun has vanished as the old farce takes musical-play form.

"Where's Charley?" is an old-style book show, and George Abbott's book is humorless. There is a routine score from Frank Loesser, with only a bright spot here and there. Ray Bolger and Allyn Ann McLerie have a nice number in "Make A Miracle" and Miss McLerie is excellent in her chanting of "The Woman in His Room."

Actually, however, "Where's Charley" has Ray Bolger and very little else. Bolger is a lanky, wide-eyed, long-legged, light-legged buffoon who dances with his legs, arms, eyes and hands. He does a bit of tap and he holds you completely in his spell when he goes into his enchanting soft shoe routine. He wears a bright costume in the Brazilian number, "Pernambuco," and a comical mustache that gives him all the ferocity of Willie Howard. A superior dancer-and comedian, this man Bolger. He needs better songs a better book, a better show.

Miss McLerie and Doretta Morrow are very pleasing to have around. Jane Lawrence has style and good looks and such players as John Lynds, Paul England and Horace Cooper do what they can with the languid book material. David Ffolkes has designed some charming backgrounds and period costumes, and George Balanchine, in his dance direction, has created some neat effects. There are also some pretty faces in the ensemble.

But "Where's Charley," presented by Cy Feuer and Ernest H. Martin, is a lackadaisical musical comedy. "Charley's Aunt" was better straight.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 12, 1948

Ray Bolger's Big Hit, But 'Where's Charley?'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Ray Bolger made a triumphant return to Broadway last night in "Where's Charley?" a mediocre musical version of "Charley's Aunt," by George Abbott and Frank Loesser. Producers Cy Feuer, Ernest H. Martin and Gwen Rickard have given the new arrival a handsome production.

"Where's Charley?" has some hilarious moments, thanks to the comedy genius of star Bolger, but hardly sufficient for a $6 hit. Librettist Abbott, unfortunately, has stuck too closely to the original plot of the venerable Brandon Thomas farce.

Bolger spends much of the evening in Victorian widow's weeds. We should have preferred seeing him more often as Bolger, angular, beaming-faced, fleet-footed funnyman. He wastes too much time impersonating an eccentric heiress from Brazil, leaving him too little time to dazzle the audience with his brilliant brand of comedy and dance.

On the few occasions when his agile feet are freed from the hobbling skirts of "Charley's Aunt," Bolger gives an amazing demonstration of dance virtuosity. He runs the gamut from soft-shoe to ballroom. But choreographer George Balanchine, who has arranged some pleasing dance ensembles, has failed to create for Ray a truly sock number, one designed to send the first-nighters out cheering.

Loesser's score is clever though not exactly what we expected from him. The most popular number in it is likely to be "My Darling, My Darling," a candidate for the Hit Parade. Several of the other numbers strike us as being mild exercises after Gilbert and Sullivan.

David Ffolkes has sketched tasteful period sets and costumes. Max Goberman's orchestra and the chorus do well by the Ted Royal-Hans Spialek-Phil Lang orchestrations and the Jerry Dolin vocal arrangements.

Cast opposite Bolger is delightful and versatile Allyn McLerie. Others in the company meriting salutes are Byron Palmer, Doretta Morrow, Paul England, Horace Cooper, Jane Lawrence and James Lane. No Abbott show would be complete without Jimmy Lane.

We wish there had been more Bolger and less Charley's Aunt on stage last night. Then we could have written as enthusiastic a notice for "Where's Charley?" as for Ray Bolger. The present tenant of the St. James has much to recommend it, but not quite enough.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 12, 1948

'Where's Charley?' Out of This World

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

There is no point in fooling around about the fact. "Where's Charley?" is a sublimely satisfactory evening. With its taste, its beauty and its vigor, it is the sort of show you fall in love with, and go back to see over and over again.

The period of the original "Charley's Aunt," of which this is a musical version, has a graciousness that is preserved here with most welcome effect. The hilarious impersonation on which the story is based points up the etiquette of the day, half a century ago, and produces an enchanting impression of good manners, good morals and good health.

Ray Bolger reaches new heights as the young student who has to pretend he is his own aunt, in order to assure his marriage. The star plays with an ease and assurance, a real polished effortlessness, that makes him a joy every moment he is on the stage.

Bolger is an expert actor, masterful in timing and ingenuity. He sings most pleasantly, with more varied effects than he has hitherto employed. Of course, when he dances he is without an equal. In one number, love struck to the tune of "Once in Love With Amy," he springs about the stage with such jubilance that the sequence alone is worth the whole evening.

Playing opposite him is Allyn McLerie, fresh and graceful as a cygnet. She sings sweetly, dances like a spring breeze, and sustains her characterization of the maidenly heroine through everything she does.

As the second pair of lovers, Doretta Morrow and Byron Palmer are handsome as magazine covers, ingratiating and vividly musical. Their "My Darling, My Darling" is something you'll find yourself singing on the streets.

Jane Lawrence is striking and melodious as the real Donna Lucia, and Paul England is a suave beau for her, while Horace Cooper is a lascivious menace.

Granted that he had a likely property to begin with, George Abbott has done a masterful job of converting the play into musical form. It is humorous and concise, constructed in a form that lets every production number become an integral progression of the show, and he has directed the whole thing with fine fast pace.

Frank Loesser wrote a score that is brisk and fresh without being deliberately tricky. The aforesaid "My Darling," "Lovelier Than Ever" and "Once in Love With Amy" are eminently hummable tunes, and he has devised a gay and comic item with the preposterous title of "The New Ashmolean Marching Society and Students' Conservatory Band" which is a great deal more rhythmic than it looks on paper.

George Balanchine has conceived some lovely dance numbers, and gets some extraordinary effects with the Brazilian number, introduced to show the flavor of Charley's aunt's homeland.

David Pfolkes has designed spacious and elegant sets, and has dressed the show with fragrant grandeur.

That just about takes care of everybody, except the ensemble which is a rarely youthful and attractive collection of talented, personable people.

Last night the audience was ready and willing to stop the show after nearly every number, and often the cast was left frozen in tableaux while the onlookers beat the skin off their hands.

So often a premiere can be an ordeal, that it was a real delight to see such a sure-fire and inspired performance as the whole company offered last night. If they continue to be one third as good in the future, they can wind the town around their little fingers.

Journal American

OCTOBER 12, 1948

An Amusing Musical With Ray Bolger

By ROBERT GARLAND

It is an amusing musical they have made from "Charley's Aunt." "They" being George Abbott, who attended to the direction and adaptation, Frank Loesser, who attended to the words and music; David Pfolkes, who attended to the sets and costumes; and George Balanchine, who attended to the dances.

The "musical" is "Where's Charley?" With Ray Bolger as its greatest asset, it came last night to the St. James Theatre.

For years and years—"Charley's Aunt" was first produced in 1892—I have been pointing out that the Brandon Thomas farce-comedy would some day make an amusing musical. And although "Where's Charley?" is not exactly the amusing musical I have in mind, it will serve acceptably until a better one comes along. I had a good and happy time last night on 44th st. where "Oklahoma" used to be.

So did almost everybody, including Ray Bolger who, as the ficticious Donna Lucia from where the nuts come from, was in finest Bolgerian fettle.

Not since the same George Abbott, plus Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, gave him "On Your Toes" to play in, has Mr. Bolger had so good and happy a time. It is his show from start to finish and the better part of Broadway was glad to see him in it.

That better part of Broadway stands for a huge wholehearted first congregation free, thanks to somebody, of the hoodlums in mink and tails who have been cheapening the recent openings with Mayfairy misdemeanors.

• • •

Follows Story

In George Abbott's adaptation, the Brandon Thomas story of "Charley's Aunt" is followed with more, rather than less, fidelity. Nowadays, when Donna Lucia fails to arrive from Brasil on schedule, Charley Wykeham impersonates her and chaperones himself and his pal, Jack Chesley, when their sweethearts come to their rooms at Oxford for a daring late-Victorian tete-a-tete.

There, as it has been for half a century, the lady who is no female is wooed and almost won by Sir Francis Chesney while the real Donna Lucia looks on with well-bred South American detachment.

Other familiar complications ensue. But they are of no unbearable excitement unless Ray Bolger is dragging the draggish costumes of the ficticious Charley's aunt with him.

Ever since 1892, Brandon Thomas' farce-comedy has had a way of sagging in the middle. And nobody, not even Mr. Bolger, has been able to pull it up entirely. Yet, thanks to the songs and dances—and to himself, if I may say so—the star of "Where's Charley?" succeeds less unsuccessfully than his predecessors. When the going gets a wee bit tough, Ray Bolger simply goes into his dance . . .

The dance into which he goes most rapturously is the softshoe number which follows the "Once in Love With Amy" which he sings alone and flawlessly. Then, an amusing musical is at its most amusing.

• • •

Palmer Is Good

Let me not give you the impression that "Where's Charley?" is a one man show. Byron Palmer, making his debut on Broadway, is a delightful Jack Chesney.

As airman into skater, into song-and-dance man, Mr. Palmer is entrusted with "My Darling, My Darling," "At the Red Rose Cotillion," the title song and "The New Ashmolean Marching Society and Students' Conservatory Band" number which is an early highspot.

The leading and the next-to-leading ladies are Allyn McLerie, who went from "One Touch of Venus" to "On the Town" and then to "Finian's Rainbow," and Doretta Morrow, who did very well by "Shootin' Star" before it shut up pre-Broadway shop in Philadelphia.

Now they help out with "My Darling, My Darling" and, in the case of Miss McLerie, the "Make a Miracle" she sings with Mr. Bolger and the "Woman in His Room" she sings alone.

George Abbott—out of respect, perhaps, for the age of "Charley's Aunt"—has directed "Where's Charley?" with a not unwelcome let-down in his customary hoopla.

Mr. Balanchine's dances are all right, I guess, although, when "Pernambuco" takes the Oxonians to Brazil, I would prefer to take a taxi and ride up to Jack Cole's "Magdalena" at the Ziegfeld. . . .

Which once more goes to prove that "Where's Charley?" is an amusing musical when Ray Bolger is in view. And Ray Bolger is in view for the greater part of the good and happy evening.

"Love Life"

The New York Times

OCTOBER 8, 1948

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Unless it is illegal to do so, this column would like to express a feeling of general disappointment over "Love Life," which was put on at the Forty-sixth Street last evening. Although billed as "a vaudeville," it is cute, complex and joyless—a general gripe masquerading as entertainment.

This may be a thoroughly illegal opinion, since some of the most honored people in show business have worked at it. Kurt Weill has written one of his most flexible and idiomatic scores for it; and Ray Middleton and Nanette Fabray sing some of his best numbers rapturously. Alan Jay Lerner, the "Brigadoon" man of letters, has written the book and lyrics. Elia Kazan, the protean director, has staged it with one or two beguiling ballets by Michael Kidd. Scenery by Boris Aronson, the old maestro; costumes by Lucinda Ballard, the enchanted seamstress. This list, with Cheryl Crawford presiding justly at the top of it, includes quite a section of the theatre's hall of fame.

* * *

But to at least one discontented theatregoer "Love Life" is an intellectual idea about showmanship gone wrong. Vaudeville has nothing to do with the bitter ideas Mr. Lerner has to express about marriage. Although he is trying to be a philosopher, unhappiness keeps creeping in. He looks jocose on the surface, but he is full of anguish.

Beginning in Colonial times, "Love Life" records the progressive failure of marriage down through the ages to modern times. In 1791 Sam and Susan Cooper are radiantly happy with their children and handcraft business. But as the years go by, the economic development of the country destroys the devotion of the Coopers, and in the raucous age of the radio they finally divorce. To Mr. Lerner the industrial revolution sounded the tocsin on love.

This is part of the grand illusion that life was pure in the old days. As the theme for an evening's entertainment it is considerably lacklustre, becoming more heavy and more spurious scene by scene, and concluding with some adolescent fantasy on a tightrope. Amid so much miscellanea, the pleasures of "Love Life" are purely incidental. One of them is a jubilant spring ballet to the glorious tune and lyrics of "Green-Up Time."

As a matter of fact, most of the pleasures come out of Mr. Weill's music-box. He has never composed a more versatile score with agreeable music in so many moods—hot, comic, blue, satiric and romantic. "Progress" and "Economics" are very literate satire. "Love Song" is a beautiful ballad that Johnny Thompson sings with genuine feeling. Mr. Middleton long ago learned how to sing Mr. Weill's music, and "This Is the Life," lanky and ruminative is an especially stirring number. Miss Fabray, an uncommonly gifted music queen, makes something lively and gay out of "Mr. Right."

* * *

But those pleasant interludes are the result of deliberate effort to find something beautiful or amusing in the lugubrious train of the story. The vaudeville sequences are generally inferior, and contribute nothing at all to the theme. "Love Life" is a pleasant-looking show that represents a lot of hard work by able theatre people who have made an effort to produce something distinguished and original. But Mr. Lerner's heart is not in enjoyment. After a glowing beginning, "Love Life" gets lost in some strange, cerebral labyrinth, and the pretense that it is vaudeville is a pose. Vaudeville is not pale and wan but hearty.

'LOVE LIFE.'

Described by the authors as a vaudeville; book and lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner; music by Kurt Weill; staged by Elia Kazan; choreography by Michael Kidd; scenery designed by Boris Aronson; costumes by Lucinda Ballard; musical director, Joseph Littau; lighting by Peggy Clark; musical arrangements and orchestrations by Kurt Weill; presented by Cheryl Crawford at the Forty-sixth Street Theater, Thursday evening, October 7, 1948. The cast:

Mary Jo	Holly Harris
Tim	Evans Thornton
George Crockett	David Thomas
Jonathan Anderson	Gene Tobin
Charlie Hamilton	Victor Clarke
Will	Mark Kramer
Hank	Robert Byrn
Ben	Leon Dale
Child	Vincent Guglielli
Sam Cooper	Ray Middleton
Susan Cooper	Nanette Fabray
Elizabeth Cooper	Cheryl Archer
Johnny Cooper	Johnny Stewart

NEW YORK STAR

October 10, 1948

A REDUNDANT 'LOVE LIFE'

By John Lardner

Such is the influence and charm of drama critics in this day and age that I know for sure that the people responsible for *Love Life*, a new musical show which opened Thursday night at the 46th Street Theatre, will be glad to consider my suggestion that they cancel their second act, which is just as much to them as a hole in the chest, and end the piece with the first act curtain.

I also know, however, that having considered the idea, they will drop it into the nearest spittoon and keep right on doing what they're doing. It's the Eightieth Congress all over again.

* * *

This leaves me with no alternative but the painful one of going straight to the voters and advising those who patronize *Love Life* to file gently but firmly out of the shooting-gallery when the first act is over. In that way, they will have seen a spotty but fairly pleasant musical entertainment, culminating in a shipboard ensemble in which Ray Middleton, the best baritone in town over 6 feet 3 inches tall, performs with dinosaurian jauntiness a funny patter number called *I'm Your man*.

The program I have sketched out contains one grave drawback. In the first act, there is a song-and-acrobat routine featuring a gaggle of urchins known in the billing as The Three Tots. Maybe we can prevail on Cheryl Crawford, the producer, and Alan Jay Lerner and Kurt Weill, the authors, to scratch this entry from act 1 and toss the three delinquents into act 2, thus setting up a *cordon sanitaire* at intermission time, with every hostile element sealed off on the far side of the border.

* * *

It's true that *Love Life*, though described as "a vaudeville," has a single theme which is meant to stretch from start to finish. But, meaning no offense, it's a theme that can be snapped off at any point in its course without damaging the artistic value of the show.

Roughly speaking, the plot is *The Skin of Our Teeth*, the Thornton Wilder play of a few years ago, set to music. It traces the career of an ageless and deathless American couple, Cooper by name, from 1791 up to what is laughingly known as the present time. The Coopers are none other than Mr. Middleton and Nanette Fabray, the latter an alumna of *Bloomer Girl* and *High Button Shoes*. Surrounded by two unnecessary offspring and a host of dancers, tumblers, and troubadors, they illustrate, with no demands whatever on your mind, the progress or decline of America from pioneering days to the age of big industry and Reno.

As I have hinted obscurely before, most of the good stuff, including the best songs in Mr. Weill's tuneful and ingenious score, is concentrated in the first act. There is a bland and cynical magician, Jay Marshall. There are three very nice tunes, *Here I'll Stay*, *I Remember It Well*, and *Green-Up Time*. There is a comical quartette number called *Economics*. Miss Fabray is sprightly and appetizing throughout this period. Mr. Middleton shows, as he did when teamed with the great Merman in the *Anything You Can Do* song in *Annie Get Your Gun*, that he can be pretty droll in a statuesque way, as well as a strong, solid sender of straight music. Mr. Lerner's book and lyrics are, up until half time, mainly neat, gay, and deftly satirical.

As for the second act, when everything goes kerplop, I will dissect this vermiform appendix very briefly: a divorce ballet, a family-at-the-radio skit, a male torch song in a hotel room, and a painfully sophisticated minstrel number. All of these are bad, and one or two are plain embarrassing.

Even at its best, *Love Life* glows with a kind of flat, artificial light, like a gas-log fire in a modern bijou apartment. At its worst, when the fire goes out and the smell of gas lingers on, your best bet is to get out into the country air of 46th Street and move east, with the traffic.

New York Post

OCTOBER 8, 1948

A Smash Musical Hit Called 'Love Life'

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

There is no getting around the fact that, taking it by and large, the American popular musical play currently has more imagination and creative spirit than the American drama. The latest evidence of this quality of being gayly adventurous is "Love Life," which came to the Forty-Sixth Street last night and which its authors, Alan Jay Lerner and Kurt Weill, call a "vaudeville." A combination of revue, serious drama and symbolic parable, it charts the collapse of domesticity in this land from 1791 to the present in bright, colorful and vigorously expansive terms. It is a musical play of excitement, distinction and style.

Because it takes it upon itself to contemplate so earnest and crusading a theme as the slow breakdown of American family life through the course of our history, the new entertainment might be in danger of becoming stuffy and serious-minded. Let it be said immediately that it is no such thing. Indeed, although it shakes its head pretty sadly over the fate of the family and tends to be gloomy on the subject of the blind negligence of men and the career-consciousness of women, its tone is gay and ironically humorous. As the study of an important sociological topic, it is frankly superficial, but as an imaginative and generally brilliant musical show, it is delightful.

Minor Objections

It has its faults. The best of it comes at the start and, although it picks up splendidly toward the close, there are some middle parts that are commonplace. It isn't always successfully integrated, so that at times the vaudeville and revue sections seem brought in to keep the theme from growing tiresome, rather than as properly satirical comment upon the subject matter. Yet such objections qualify in a decidedly minor way my admiration for "Love Life." What is important is that it does possess imagination and vitality in its ideas and its staging, and that its music, lyrics, dancing and costuming are humorous and charming.

It is also happy in the casting of its two leading roles. As the husband and wife who move agelessly through the transmutations of marriage from the days of the Revolution—if you will pardon the word—to the Atomic Age, Nanette Fabray and Ray Middleton are a joy. There was a time when I couldn't quite understand why there was so much general excitement over Miss Fabray, but now, far too belatedly, I agree that she is enchanting, playing with a spirit and sparkle that are irresistible. Mr. Middleton, who was so good in "Annie Get Your Gun," is here even finer. He sings and acts like a man and an artist.

Talent at Work

There is a long list of contributors to the show that must be applauded. Mr. Lerner's lyrics are varied, intelligent and amusing. Mr. Weill's music is striking, lively and tuneful, serious or satirical as the mood demands. Michael Kidd's staging of the dances is always fresh and unhackneyed, and there is an early number about a party in 1821, before the hero goes off to work in a factory, that is nothing short of superb. Lucinda Ballard's costumes are a wonderful riot of color and satire. Sparks always fly in the theatre when so many talented and creative people work together amid such excellent team spirit.

I confess that I found the revue numbers, on the whole, more entertaining than the sections dutifully confined to the book. Eight strange gentlemen singing a sardonic song about progress, a splendid Negro quartet telling about love and economics, a fantastic madrigal society doing a thing called "Ho, Billy O!," three terrifying children out of a Charles Addams drawing, a minstrel show, even a good-natured magician named Jay Marshall—here would be high points in any man's revue. What if the subject of American domesticity doesn't get very far? "Love Life" gives the season its first real musical hit.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 8, 1948

'Love Life' a Basic Marriage Allegory

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Because "Love Life" follows several patterns all its own, it is a difficult show to describe. For the same reason it is impossible to discuss it without first describing it. Digging under a mass of trim and method, one arrives at a basic allegory of marriage.

With more of a story line than a plot, the show discusses the difficulty of preserving a union under the constant impacts of civilization's speed-up and distraction. For emphasis and illumination, various sequences are preceded by actual vaudeville acts, which satirically bridge the incidents in the domestic disintegration.

A second method, employed up to the beginning of the second act, is to bring the characters from 1791 to the present without aging them. Perhaps this is intended to illustrate the sources of industrial and scientific advances which now make it necessary to fight for contentment. Little things like the radio, comic books and the right of women to work, are presented as irritations, designed to upset the home.

Permanent Truth.

This mystic chronology implies that life used to be a good deal pleasanter in the old days. Yet the final solution that happiness involves the facing of risky reality, must have been as true of early Egyptians as it is of modern couples.

The author has a simple solid thing to say, which is so tricked up here with dissimilar elements, that the show's purpose is not clarified until the final scene. There husband and wife reconcile as they teeter toward each other across a tight rope. Before that the show is like a game which keeps the audience fighting for its own assimilation of purposes. "Love Life" may well prove the subject of the most argumentative dinner conversations of the year.

Life is simple and fine for the Samuel Coopers and their two youngsters while Sam builds furniture by hand in the 18th century. Then "Progress" sets in as an amusing song showing how hard it can be on love. Sam's departure for a factory in 1821 is a signal for a gay and kickful dance to "Green Up Time."

There follows what amounts to a revue blackout as Sam, a traveling man, decides the most propitious time in his schedule for Susan to have a baby. Then three extraordinary stage-wise infants sing that "Mother's Getting Nervous," and we find Susan organizing the suffragettes of the '90's.

A Boozey Cruise.

In the '20's the Coopers are on a boozy, jazzy cruise, looking for kicks; and in the present they are both worling, irritable and inconsiderate. A Punch and Judy ballet reveals their divorce in one of the show's brightest incidents.

Unhappy apart, the couple watch the illusions they have sought, in a minstrel finale. This is climaxed by a rich satire on what the average woman expects from a man, in the song "Mr. Right," which is to Nanette Fabray as Susan, what "Jenny" once was to Gertrude Lawrence.

"Love Life" switches moods so rapidly and often, that it sometimes seems ashamed of them. Some sequences are pointed, clear and witty. Others are so querulously introverted that they suggest a person taking out his innards for a morbid and puzzled look at them.

Tries Too Hard.

It would be wicked to discourage novelty in the theater, but "Love Life" tries too hard for comfort to be different. It suggests that theatrical conventions like unities of time, place and subject, were developed over the years for pretty good reasons.

The huge cast is fine, with Nanette Fabray at her engaging best in animated numbers like "Women's Club Blues" and "Mr. Right." Ray Middleton peaks a sturdy and good-humored performance with his truly expert singing of "This Is the Life."

There is plenty of entertainment in "Love Life." The enormous scope of the work and its scrutiny of so specific a subject, has led to arbitrary arrangement and selection of material, until the net result is a sample book of show business. It is a harvest from a meadow sown with pecks of assorted seeds.

The Sun

OCTOBER 8, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE

'Love Life' a Festive Hit.

American domestic life over a period of 150 years is subjected to satirical song-and-dance scrutiny in an exhilarating and distinctive musical show, "Love Life," which Cheryl Crawford brought last evening into the Forty-sixth Street theater. Nanette Fabray and Ray Middleton, teamed up as the featured players, had a big night.

"Love Life" is ironic and amusing; it has gayety, spontaneity and originality. Alan Jay Lerner's notion in writing the book has been to dramatize the lives of the indestructible Coopers against the changing American scene, and to comment, via song and dance and sketch and skit, on the early uncertainties of our nation, and on the trends, the crazes, the progress, the smugness and the hope of a great republic. If he has not been entirely successful he has certainly provided a stimulating libretto, and it has been staged with uncommon skill by Elia Kazan.

Notwithstanding a certain banality that creeps in here and there, Lerner's book is wieldy. His lyrics are sharp. Kurt Weill has fashioned a bright score, which includes "Green-Up Time," a definite song hit. Boris Aaronson has contributed some imaginative settings, Lucinda Ballard some stunning costumes, and Michael Kidd's choreography is first rate. Even those who admit a loathing for the ballet will relish "Punch and Judy Get A Divorce."

"Love Life" starts off with vaudeville acts stringing its story together, but this is a device that is more or less discarded as the show moves along. You'll like the Coopers, Susan and Sam, as they're played by Nanette Fabray and Ray Middleton. Susan and Sam are ageless and timeless. You meet them first in 1791 and they remain unchanged through the years. In the days of the early struggles of America life was simpler and more folksy and the Coopers knew only domestic bliss. Industrialism brought on tension and strain; the twentieth century created frenzy, and the madness of the Twenties just about finished Susan and Sam, as it did so many of us. But "Love Life" ends blissfully, and with an enchanting finale. The Coopers seemed good for another 150 years when I took leave of them last night.

If Lerner and Weill had ransacked the continent they couldn't have found two more ingratiating players than Nanette Fabray and Ray Middleton for the roles of Susan and Sam. Miss Fabray dances, clowns, shrieks, whistles and sings—well enough. She has a fine number in "Women's Club Blues" and she will be stopping the show in "Mr. Right." The big and booming Ray Middleton sings wonderfully and is quite at ease in the sketches.

There's all too little of Lyle Bettger, one of the most incisive young actors the theater has. You listen to this fellow when he talks, just as you did when he appeared as the bogus Lieutenant from the Paramount usher staff in "John Loves Mary." There's zestful work from Victor Clarke, Holly Harris, David Thomas and Carolyn Maye. The "Radio Night" interlude in the show's second half needs Director Kazan's attention, and will probably get it.

"Love Life" presents the song and dance stage in an experimental and imaginative mood. It's a thoroughly stimulating show. You'll begin liking it the instant Jay Marshall steps forth as the Magician, and it will hold you in its spell for most of the evening.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 8, 1948

'Love Life' Is a Superior Musical, Being Smart and Handsome, Too

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In conception and in performance, Cheryl Crawford's new musical, "Love Life," is superb. It is novel in construction, full of neat surprises and sung, danced and acted by an engaging company. Its costumes and sets are delightful, and two of Michael Kidd's dance numbers rank with Agnes de Mille's work in "Oklahoma" and Jerome Robbins' Mack Sennett number in "High Button Shoes" as major pleasures of the last half decade.

"Love Life" opened last evening at the beautifully redecorated 46th St. Theatre. Half way through it, I heard the lady behind me say, brightly, to her companion, "Oh, I'm not bored! I'm just puzzled." I'm glad she wasn't bored, because I wasn't, either. Now and then I'd have trimmed a number and might have left out one or two—but these would be small improvements on a musical which has high style.

The show has a message, and we might as well stop worrying about it right now. It is the kind of message which should be carved on the trunk of a tree and not delivered from a soap box; all it amounts to is that boy should have girl and nothing else matters.

From Then to Now.

"Love Life" carries a fairly immortal couple from their New England home in 1791 down to the present time. As the couple, Ray Middleton and Nanette Fabray don't change a bit, except for costumes. But their country and their lives change considerably from the time when Mr. Middleton was a simple carpenter engaged in the handicrafting of antiques to the time when he works in a bank and Miss Fabray works in a store and they wind up in a divorce court.

The love life of this couple gets more difficult as progress, industrialization and economics develop. Alan Jay Lerner, the librettist and lyrist, keeps pointing this out in songs and sketches which, now and then, are offered as vaudeville acts and which interrupt the little story of what's been happening to Nanette and Ray for the last 150 years. These interludes must have been what puzzled the lady behind me; but I found most of them original and quite witty.

Kurt Weill has not only written the music; he also has made the orchestrations — and he has been both deft and humorous. The arrangements are uncommonly vibrant and varied, and two songs, "Here I'll Stay" and "Green-up Time," should prove popular.

A Dancing Divorce.

I shan't say too much about the many numbers because it might take the edge off the neat surprises. But, in the hope of enticing you into seeing "Love Life," I'd like to tell of one or two.

The dance for the "Green-up Time" number is charming, and admirably costumed by Lucinda Ballard. The divorce-court dance, in which all the characters are Punch and Judy show puppets, is a masterful conceit. Two little boys and a fat little girl—Vincent Gugleotti, Lenn Dale and Rosalie Alter—knock the house down with a vaudeville-type song about Mother getting nervous. A Negro quartet does a song about economics in the style of "Dry Bones." In the 1890's a group of Miss Fabray's female friends go all out for women's rights, including the right to strip down to long underwear and dance.

Mr. Middleton, a big, nice guy with a big, nice voice, and Miss Fabray, a cute, pretty and zestful little imp, make very good principals. At any moment any member of an unusually competent chorus may step up and do an amusing bit, like the fortune-telling duet by Carolyn Maye and Holly Harris. Elia Kazan has directed the show smartly, and Boris Aronson's settings are handsome and amusing.

"Love Life" is upper class.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 8, 1948

'Love Life' at 46th St. Is a Star-Spangled Hit

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Cheryl Crawford established a new high standard for Broadway musicals last evening, with "Love Life," at the Forty-Sixth Street Theatre. Author Alan Jay Lerner and composer Kurt Weill have fashioned a superlative entertainment—a song and dance show with great heart, soaring imagination, welcome novelty and keen observation.

The delightful new arrival has been given a superb production by producer Crawford. Elia Kazan's direction, Michael Kidd's choreography, Boris Aronson's sets and Lucinda Ballard's costumes merit hurrahs. A salute also should go to Joseph Littau, who conducted Weill's intricately orchestrated score admirably.

"Love Life," via an adroit blend of story line and vaudeville, depicts the changes in values in American family life since the founding of our nation. It traces the romantic, economic and cultural thread of an American family from Revolutionary days to the present. It is an exciting study of the rise, demise and rebirth of standards.

But don't let this brief synopsis of its import scare you away, for "Love Life" is wonderful theatre. You'll love every minute of it. And it is a great achievement because it manages to be constantly entertaining while making its points. That's why we think it's great.

Sam and Susan Cooper, hero and heroine of "Love Life," are brought to life with fine feeling and tremendous emotional effect by Nanette Fabray and Ray Middleton. Had we cast the new hit, they would have been our choices for the demanding assignments. They are perfect. They are magnificent.

Though both Miss Fabray and Middleton received deserved ovations from the thrilled first-nighters, we must report that there was a spontaneous and unbelievably enthusiastic demonstration following Miss Fabray's electric delivery of "Mr. Right," which we think is going to rate as one of the theatre's all-time tops in torch songs.

Other first-raters in the cast are Rosalie Alter, Vincent Gugliotti and Lenn Dale, a stellar juvenile trio; Elly Ardelty, an artist on the trapeze, who unfortunately hasn't sufficent time on stage to really display her artistry; the Go-Getters' Octette, the "Economics" Quartette, magician Jay Marshall, Johnny Thompson, Lyle Bettger, Victor Clark, Cheryl Archer and Johnny Stewart.

Space prevents us from delivering posies in person to other standouts in the company, but here's a big bouquet for them all.

Incidentally, we wish to commend Miss Crawford for starting the evening with "The Star Spangled Banner." Praise be, she realizes that our national anthem is not something to be taken for granted, to be put in moth balls and exhumed only in emergencies. And it was appropriate that "The Star Spangled Banner" should raise the curtain on a star-spangled musical.

"Winchell says: "Long life to 'Love Life'! Broadway's newest sweetheart!"

Journal American

OCTOBER 8, 1948

'Vaudeville' Show 'Elegantly Unusual'

By ROBERT GARLAND

Vaudeville is here. "A" vaudeville, not "The." Disguised as a musical-comedy with a message—or as a message with a musical-comedy—it arrived last evening at the 46th Street Theatre. With the adventurous standard of Cheryl Crawford at the masthead, "Love Life" is the collaborative result of a get-together by some of the first Broadway talents.

The first Broadway talents—all right, call this stalling if you want to—that got together on this musical-comedy with a message are Elia Kazan, director, Michael Kidd, choreographer, Boris Aronson, designer, and Lucinda Ballard, costumer. And, before these big ones approached it, Alan Jay Lerner composed the words and Kurt Weill made up the music.

Yet—here ends the stalling—with all these names printed at the beginning of the program, the entertainment that comes after it is, to word it nicely, up-and-downish. Even as a "vaudeville," which is what the makers call it, "Love Life" is not always as exciting as the title implies. As "act" follows "act," the interest lessens as the novelty runs down . . .

But a minstrel show, followed by a pair of love-lifers out on a tight rope, brings refreshment to the end. I was regretful when the curtains closed before the man and woman managed to get themselves actually together.

• • •

Confusion Established

Those love-lifers who, out on a tight rope, close the show at the beautifully redecorated 46th Street Theatre, are the protagonists of Miss Crawford's vaudeville. Susan and Sam by name, you come across them when, on the brightly lighted stage, a magician puts Sam up in the air by means of levitation and saws Susan in half by means of optical illusion.

Then, with their utter confusion definitely established, you meet them as they — or their staunch American counterparts—were in 1791. They and their offspring, Johnny and Elizabeth. And, unaging but progressively less staunch and less American, you meet them in 1821 and 1857, in 1890 and 1920, and at the present time. The current picture is not a pretty one.

And that, I take it, is the message "Love Life" brings. What America needs is a good and happy home. A good and happy home with a Sam and a Susan, a Johnny and an Elizabeth, living co-operatively therein. And I would not be surprised if the musical-comedy with a message—or the other way around—has got something there. Something of importance!

Even so, "Love Life" is best when the message is off-stage and vaudeville is on. And, after the piece's first and un-vaudeville-like attempt at significant story-telling, vaudeville is on with every other number.

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Singing and Dancing

As the Coopers, Sam and Susan, Ray Middleton and Nanette Fabray are everything they should be. They sing, they dance, and, when "Love Life" is untroubled by modernity, they indulge in real upstanding acting. And Johnny Stewart and Cheryl Archer, as their unaging offspring, are fine. They, too, sing and dance and act upstandingly when required.

In the vaudeville-within-a-vaudeville which punctuates the Coopers' downward progress toward today, The Go-Getters sing a song called "Progress," a quartette sings a song called "Economics," a hobo sings a song which could be called "Rock Candy Mountain" and some madrigalists sing a song called "Ho, Billy O." These, along with "Here I'll Stay," "Green-Up Time" and "Mr. Right," are admirable.

As producer, Miss Crawford has given "Love Life" a smart and not too cumbersome production. In a couple of the dances, Mr. Kidd is back in his pre-"Hold It" stride. Mr. Kazan falters only in his second act direction. But the backgrounds by Mr. Aronson and the costumes by Miss Ballard are a constant comfort. More so is the orchestra under Joseph Littau's baton . . .

In the stunning new interior of the 46th Street Theatre, "Love Life" may not turn out to be the pot of gold at the end of "Finian's Rainbow." But, as a "vaudeville," it is elegant, unusual, and, for the most part, entertaining, with a message for those who take the time to care.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 8, 1948

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Marriage and Vaudeville

A GAY variation of the musical show formula gets definitely out of hand in "Love Life," at the Forty-sixth Street Theater. The "vaudeville," as it is called, is a chronicle of marriage problems from Revolutionary days to the present, interspersed with odd variety turns, choral numbers and a dreadful display of infantile precocity. With a fair to middling score by Kurt Weill, elegant choreography by Michael Kidd and a handsome decor, the offering is always iridescent and occasionally completely captivating. The flywheel unfortunately slows down in a succession of olios until it takes all the charm and craft of its leading players, Nanette Fabray and Ray Middleton, to get the production past the finish line.

* * *

Alan Jay Lerner, of "Brigadoon" fame, is author and lyricist of the "vaudeville." His originality is not matched by a disciplined imagination in this new concoction. For much of the first act there is a fresh and impudent alternation of period song and dance numbers and magic acts, satirical ballads and even a trapeze artist. After so promising a start, the introduction of a trio of incredibly cock-sure brats and a scene in which ladies of the '90s strip to long underwear, is, to say the least, jarring. In the final scenes the whole device becomes something of a hodge-podge, with a Punch and Judy divorce number, and a minstrel show finale. The old-style musical is not seriously threatened by "Love Life."

* * *

The moments of high satisfaction in this Cheryl Crawford exhibit are those which find Miss Fabray and Middleton singing "Here I'll Stay," or "I Remember It Well" in costumes ranging through a century and a half, or in the "Green-Up Time" syncopated reel and the dance ensemble pantomiming a divorce by collusion. Miss Fabray is superbly gay and grave, making what she can of the book, and going it alone triumphantly in such a fetching bit as "Mr. Right." She has no such song as "Papa Won't You Dance With Me" to captivate an audience, but she does just that throughout "Love Life." Middleton is not far behind her. After his extended labors in "Annie Get Your Gun," he is as dynamic, full-throated and assured as ever. In "My Kind of Night" he takes over the whole stage very satisfactorily.

The variety turns are sometimes rewarding. Jay Marshall's magician is disarmingly adroit; the Go-Getters have a wonderful time with the ditty "Progress"; a Negro quartette goes to town in "Economics" and Johnny Thompson laments plaintively as a hobo in "Love Song." Then there is a take-off on madrigal singing called "Ho, Billy O!" which is a boisterous punctuation to the proceedings. Kidd has given his dancers a variety of paces to run through which are generally entrancing and the Boris Aronson sets and the Lucinda Ballard costumes are first-rate. Elia Kazan has staged this hoop-la musical melange, but the gifted director has never seemed to be quite sure what mood he is trying to evoke. "Love Life" is a fresh and stimulating approach to a somewhat seedy stage form, but it remains more of an approach than an accomplishment.

"Summer and Smoke"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

OCTOBER 7, 1948

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

No Desire

THERE is little in "Summer and Smoke" to make it recognizable as a work of one of the most gifted playwrights of our time. The production at the Music Box finds Tennessee Williams as fumbling and obvious as he is trenchant and evocative in "A Streetcar Named Desire." Here again are the crazy, degraded and frustrated characters with whom the author has always been so deeply concerned. Instead of developing to an inexorable climax, they are manipulated like puppets to fit an idea which is neither dramatic, theatrical nor sensible. A brilliant setting by Jo Mielziner and several arresting performances do not keep the offering from being a pretentious and amateurish bore.

It is generally a mistake for an artist who has arrived to dig into his trunk. Williams should not have done so with "Summer and Smoke." This fore-runner of "A Streetcar Named Desire" has almost none of the latter's soaring imagination, its quick poetry or its compassionate tragedy. Only occasionally does a scene ring with genuine meaning and feeling, as a reckless doctor's son and a rather daft minister's daughter engage in an interminable duel of the body and the spirit. It has been the dramatist's notion to turn the tables during a summer and winter in Glorious Hill, Miss., in 1916. The trick is not calculated to fool the most myopic spectator. All that remains is summed up by the ill-starred heroine when she remarks that every one concerned in the doings is peculiar.

* * *

This early Williams, which was tried out several seasons ago in Dallas by its present producer, Margo Jones, is sorely lacking in discipline. Those who found the prize-winning "The Glass Menagerie" somewhat inchoate must admit that it was a model of craftsmanship compared to "Summer and Smoke." The latter creates interesting figures only to discard them, such as the minister's wife, who is nutty as a fruitcake. It resorts to the most arrant melodramatic devices to keep the action from bogging down entirely, as when a roadhouse gangster shoots the doctor's father to save him from what might be euphemistically described as an unfortunate marriage. It winds up with the renegade hero turning square with a buxom lass and the girl who dreams of Gothic arches taking up with traveling salesmen.

* * *

The truth is that bad Tennessee Williams is bad theater. Margaret Phillips struggles hard with the role of Alma, who has literary get-togethers in the rectory. She is properly affected but the script never permits her to be affecting. Tod Andrews is fine as the drunken, lecherous young doctor. He deserves something better than "Summer and Smoke." Raymond Van Sickle, Margo Ann Deighton, Anne Jackson, Ralph Theadore and Betty Greene Little have fleeting moments of persuasion, but they add next to nothing to the play as a whole. Miss Jones has not helped matters perceptibly with her staging, which is generally on a plane of inertia. It is a pity that the Mielziner setting, which embraces two neighboring houses and a town square in an imaginative design could not have housed something of more consequence.

'SUMMER AND SMOKE.'

Play by Tennessee Williams; staged by Margo Jones; scenery and lighting by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Rose Bogdanoff; original music and scoring by Paul Bowles; presented by Margo Jones at the Music Box, Wednesday evening, October 6, 1948. The cast:

Alma as a child	Ariene McQuade
John as a child	Donald Hastings
Rev. Winemiller	Raymond Van Sickle
Mrs. Winemiller	Margo Ann Deighton
John Buchanan Jr.	Tod Andrews
A Girl	Hildy Parks
Dusty	William Layton
Dr. Buchanan	Ralph Theadore
Alma Winemiller	Margaret Phillips
Rosa Gonzales	Monica Boyar
Nellie Ewell	Anne Jackson
Roger Doremus	Earl Montgomery
Mrs. Bassett	Betty Greene Little
Vernon	Spencer James
Rosemary	Ellen James
Papa Gonzalez	Sid Cassel
Mr. Kramer	Ray Walston

Synopsis: The entire action of the play takes place in Glorious Hill, Mississippi. Time: Turn of the century through 1916.

The New York Times

OCTOBER 7, 1948

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although Tennessee Williams writes a gentle style, he has a piercing eye. In "Summer and Smoke," which was put on at the Music Box last evening, he looks again into the dark corners of the human heart, and what he sees is terrifying. This is a tone poem in the genre of "The Glass Menagerie" and "A Streetcar Named Desire"—the same mystic frustration and the same languid doom. So far Mr. Williams has been writing variations on the same theme. But again the insight into character is almost unbearably lucid. Although it derives from compassion, it is cruel in its insistence on the truth. Mr. Williams is full of scorn for the rootless people he pities. He will not raise a finger to spare them from misery. And "Summer and Smoke" has one further distinction: a memorable performance by Margaret Phillips and Tod Andrews in the central parts. Out of Mr. Williams' quiet, evocative style they have drawn immense sympathy and wonder, binding the fragments of the play into a single strand of somber, tragic emotion.

* * *

As a poet Mr. Williams is less concerned with events than with adventures of the spirit. Nothing much happens in "Shmmer and Smoke" except that the minister's daughter loves the physician's son next door and can never break

through a shadowy wall that separates them. All her life she reaches out after him, but he pulls away. She is respectable, religious, pure-minded and idealistic. He is wild and dissipated and believes as thoroughly in gratifying the flesh as she does in worshiping the spirit. Halfway through the play his dissipations result in a disaster that shocks him, and now he realizes that she has always been right. He, too, now believes in the reality of the spirit. But again they pass each other. Fate stands inexplicably between them.

* * *

Like its predecessors, the play is slight in content. Mr. Williams writes brief scenes, generally for a few characters. But he is a writer of superb grace and allusiveness, always catching the shape and sound of ideas rather than their literal meaning. As its title suggests, "Summer and Smoke" deals in truths that are insubstantial. But as Mr. Williams sees it, these are the truths that are most profound and the most painful, for they separate people who logically should be together and give life its savage whims and its wanton destructiveness. Although he is dealing in impulses that cannot be literally defined, the twin themes of his tone poem are clearly stated: spirit and flesh, order and anarchy. He has caught them in the troubled brooding of two human hearts.

If he is a poet, he is a poet of the theatre. "Summer and Smoke" is no literary exercise but a theatre piece charged with passion and anguish. Margo Jones, who directed the original performance in Dallas, has brought it to the stage with infinite respect for its delicate qualities. On a large stage it loses some of the moving intimacy that it had in the cramped quarters of the Dallas theatre. But Jo Mielziner, who must be a genius after all, has designed a glorious setting of lightly penciled lines and curves as airy as the writing. And Paul Bowles has composed a modestly stated descriptive score. Rose Bogdanoff has designed a wardrobe of lovely, idealized costumes.

The acting is light in style and appreciative in moods that appear to be orchestrated. Raymond Van Sickle as a fussy pastor, Betty Greene Little as a cheerful gossip, Anne Jackson as an exuberant girl of the neighborhood, Monica Boyar as a tempestuous Mexican slut, Marga Ann Deighton as a demented old woman, Ralph Theadore as a responsible elderly physician give warm and neatly-defined performances.

* * *

But "Summer and Smoke" rises or falls on the quality of the acting in the two chief parts, Miss Phillips and Mr. Andrews lift it to the level of a vibrant work of art. Mr. Andrews is a handsome, masculine young actor who can draw a fine line between bravado and gentlemanliness, and his portrait of the physician's son is both sensitive and sturdy. As the rueful, slightly hysterical spinster, Miss Phillips has presented the stage with a masterpiece. Behind the desperation and silliness of the character she manages to establish the pride of a woman who is essentially noble. Mr. Williams and his two principal actors have performed the miracle of translating a drab corner of life into something that is tremulous with beauty.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 7, 1948

'Summer and Smoke' a Talkative, Muddled Drama of Repressed Sex

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The new Tennessee Williams drama, "Summer and Smoke," is a juvenile and sadly delinquent effort. Mawkish, murky, maudlin and monotonous, it went on and on at the Music Box last evening. So far as I could divine, Mr. Williams' only purpose in conducting this dramatic experiment was to see if he could make an actress, Margaret Phillips, talk herself to death right in front of a paying audience.

Miss Phillips survived, being stouter than she looks. In the role of a cold young spinster with a passionate soul she is pictorially interesting and she battles bravely against the flood of words. She reminds me of the time Gertrude Ederle made her first try at swimming the Channel and, dogged and stout-hearted though she was, had to give up within sight of the Dover coast when the tide turned.

Texas Production.

"Summer and Smoke" is the production of Margo Jones, a Texas torchbearer who tried out the play last year in Dallas. Miss Jones has given it a superb physical mounting—a setting by Jo Mielziner which combines great beauty and perfect practicality. Mr. Mielziner should have written the play, for I think he knows more about it than Mr. Williams does.

The scenic offering is about the only credit I can extend to Miss Jones, who also directed; except for scattered instants in which a couple of actors would get interested and get going, last evening's performance sounded like the work of a class in elocution.

Once again Mr. Williams is interested in batty and repressed people. Among his exhibits are:

Likes Ice Cream.

A young spinster. A rakehell young doctor next door. (Spinster disapproves of doctor, of course, but beneath her prim exterior there beats the heart of a wanton and within five minutes one knows for a certainty that she is going to spend the rest of the evening pining for him and she won't get him in the end.)

Spinster's father, a clergyman with a cross to bear. Spinster's mother, the cross. (This lady is crazy; she is addicted to ice cream cones and they are always taking her down to the drug store to get her one instead of fixing her a nice bed in the attic and locking her in.)

Sundry neighbors, either dull or malicious. And a couple of young women of reasonable vigor to keep the amatory young doctor busy practicing.

Tod Andrews is handsome and reasonably human as the libidinous medic, although he seems handicapped by not knowing precisely what the author wants him to be. I have a belief that Mr. Williams, after choosing his locale as a small Mississippi town and his time around 1916, started a number of town characters talking and then didn't come back to tell them when it was time to quit.

Well, every lusty young author has a right to sow his tame oats, I guess.

Journal American

OCTOBER 7, 1948

Unneeded Foreword To Streetcar Theme

By ROBERT GARLAND

Intentionally or unintentionally, as the case may be, Tennessee Williams has written an illuminating and unnecessary foreword to his "A Streetcar Named Desire." Under the title of "Summer and Smoke," Margo Jones of Dallas proudly presented it last evening at the Music Box. There, promptly on the stroke of eight, the season's best-dressed, best-behaved and best-intentioned first-night congregation was seated to receive it.

When I say that, in "Summer and Smoke," Mr. Williams has written a foreword to his "A Streetcar Named Desire," a foreword is exactly what I mean. Although the Blanche De Bois at the Ethel Barrymore is known as Alma Winemiller at the Music Box, they are one and the same. Maybe Miss Winemiller of Glorious Hill turned herself into Miss Du Bois of Belle Reve when she went to stay with her married sister 'way down south in New Orleans.

At any rate, I am here to tell you that the Tennessee Williams-hungry playgoer could, at any weekend matinee, leave the Music Box at teatime and take up where he left off that evening at dinner at the Ethel Barrymore. For, in "Summer and Smoke," the author of "A Streetcar Named Desire" goes to great pains to explain at length how Blanche Du Bois got the way she is when she shows up nymphomaniacally in the Vieux Carre.

* * *

Inferior—Talkier

And I wish I were here to tell you that the Tennessee Williams-hungry playgoer would be sure to have as good a playgoing time at "Summer and Smoke" as he is sure to have at "A Streetcar Named Desire." But he will not! Just as Lillian Hellman's "Another Part of the Forest" was an illuminating and unnecessary foreword to her "Little Foxes," which had come before, Mr. Williams' new play is also inferior to the old. And talkier!

Yet all the stock Tennessee Williams figures are up on the stage. Especially the females of the deep Deep Southern species. The Alma Winemiller played by Margaret Phillips is, as I have written, the Blanche Du Bois played by Jessica Tandy. And Blanche Du Bois is the Laura Wingfield played by Julie Haydon. So, I beg you, do not let Mr. Williams' apologetic pieces in the Sunday papers persuade

you otherwise.

In "Summer and Smoke," Alma Winemiller, a clergyman's frustrated daughter, has an overpowering yen for John Buchanan, a physician's unfrustrated son. And, as was the case with Blanche and Stanley in "A Streetcar Named Desire," and Laura and Jim in "The Glass Menagerie," the female's frustration is more deadly than the male's lack of it. Nowadays, at the Music Box, Alma's frustration talks her right into the arms of a certain Mr. Kramer.

Out of Smoking-Room

For no good reason, Mr. Kramer is a traveling salesman right out of a smoking-room story. And, as the final curtain falls at the Music Box, Alma Winemiller wanders away with him. Out into 45th Street she goes, I fancy. Then up to 47th where, as Blanche Du Bois, she continues her career as a windy Dixie introvert who, I am sure, is done exactly right by. Only, at the Music Box, the bad little good girl is no Jessica Tandy.

Not that Margaret Phillips, pinch-hitting, fails to do justice to Tennessee Williams' last example of acute Southern discomfiture. But Tennessee Williams' last example of acute Southern discomfiture does not do justice to Margaret Phillips. As for Tod Andrews as Jim O'Connor-into-Stanley Kowalski-into-John Buchanan, he is as impolitely picaresque as the occasion calls for. The others, under Margo Jones' direction, are all there.

So are Jo Mielziner's typically Tennessee Williams setting, Paul Bowles' typically Tennessee Williams music and Rose Bogdanoff's typically Rose Bogdanoff costumes. Last night, when "Summer and Smoke" piped down for intermission, wisecrackers called it "A Kiddy-Kar Called Conversation." It is a somewhat better play than that, with pretty patches of highfalutin' writing . . . but "A Kiddy-Kar Called Conversation" certainly does give you a good idea!

New York Post

OCTOBER 7, 1948

A Rather Gloomy Report On 'Summer and Smoke'

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Tennessee Williams continues his studies of frustrated and disintegrating Southern womanhood in "Summer and Smoke," which arrived at the Music Box last night. Once more he is to be found contemplating the sad fate of a dreamy and idealistic girl, whose unsuccessful sex life finally leads her into a dreary career of promiscuity. As usual, Mr. Williams writes with sensitivity and probing insight, and he continues to be one of the few really arresting newcomers in the American theatre. Nevertheless, I am forced to report that I found his new drama only intermittently satisfactory.

It has been said that it is unfair to Mr. Williams to compare each play of his to its predecessors, and that they should be judged solely on their individual merits. It happens, however, that he, himself, makes it almost impossible to do so. There is so much similarity between "The Glass Menagerie," "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "Summer and Smoke" in theme and characterization that a comparison between them is virtually inescapable. With this in view, I must record my impression that the new play is less moving than "The Glass Menagerie" and lacks the sense of pity and horror of "A Streetcar Named Desire."

Glorious Hill

The scene of "Summer and Smoke" is the town of Glorious Hill, Mississippi, and the time is described as from the "turn of the century to 1916." Its central figure is Alma Winemiller, daughter of a preacher father and an insane mother, a shy, sensitive girl, who teaches music and is regarded by the townspeople as affected. Idealistically in love with a rakish young physician, she is shocked by his frankly physical advances, only to find, when she eventually decides to accept them, that he is no longer interested in her. In the end, you see her going off resignedly with a traveling salesman.

One of the weaknesses of the play is that, while its hero and heroine think and talk a lot about sex and passion, there is an almost academic quality about their preoccupations. Certainly they are never dramatized with the power, the sense of overwhelming physical need, and the realistic understanding that, in great part due to Elia Kazan's direction, went into "A Streetcar Named Desire" and made it so memorable. "Summer and Smoke" has sharp and touching scenes, but it does not drive forward with that inexorable feeling of inescapable doom that represents Mr. Williams at his best.

Margaret Phillips

An important virtue of the drama is that it provides the first full-length role for Margaret Phillips, the finest and most sensitive of our younger actresses. As the characteristically luckless Williams heroine, Miss Phillips is believable, moving and in just the right mood in a role that represents grave difficulties. Although it is probably not as long as that of Blanche Dubois in "Streetcar," it seems even longer, because it is so frequently garrulous and monotonous, suggesting that poor Alma was not a girl to use one word when three would do. There is an excellent performance by Tod Andrews as the doctor, while Marga Ann Deighton as the mad mother and Betty Greene as a gossip are particularly credible. I liked Ray Walston's salesman and Jo Mielziner's set.

"Summer and Smoke" is not a play to be easily dismissed. It is clearly the work of a striking and rather disturbing talent, and there are sections that are moving and compassionate in conception and writing. Obviously Mr. Williams is a dramatist with a style and point of view that make him stand out notably from the run-of-the-mill playwright. But as long as he continues to cover the same territory the similarity of his plays invites odious comparisons, and this is not one of his most successful works.

New York World-Telegram

OCTOBER 7, 1948

Tennessee 'Smoke' Smothers Its Fire

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Tennessee Williams has written in "Summer and Smoke" a play so tenuous and so delicate that its title seems leaden by comparison to its content.

The play is about young people, and the faithfulness to their unsophistication is remarkable. Unfortunately, truthful as they may be, they are entirely without charm, and have neither the originality nor oddity to make them interesting.

In the end one is surprised at how little he knows about them, then wonders if, after all, there was any more about them to know.

Must Have a Soul.

A preacher's daughter has loved from childhood the son of a doctor next door. Repressed by the manners of a small town early in the century, and further saddled with a dull father and a mentally retarded mother, the girl, Alma, seems to know only that she must be a lady and have a soul.

She likes to retire behind "nervous heart trouble" and elegant conversation. It is a real binge for her to "feel like a water lily in a Chinese lagoon."

John studies to be a doctor like his father, but indulges in a natural enough exploration of wine and women. The satisfaction of sensuous appetites is ultimate living in his youthful book. This not only shocks Alma but seriously interferes with his career.

She Loses Interest.

When his father is shot in a mess the boy stirred up he veers toward a respectable and constructive way of living. At about the same time Alma decides John is right, and offers to have an affair with him.

He no longer is interested, and she takes up with the first traveling salesman she meets.

This is a study in extreme and false standards, the recognition of which is no more than universal maturing. Instead of developing, these people seem rather to act against nature, largely because they had no dimensional character to begin with.

The play takes itself seriously in a dreamy way that allows no humor, and as it is performed the conversation is stilted, repetitious and without eloquence. Much of the dialogue is deliberately forced and contrived to express embarrassment.

Endless Talk.

Like the well-bred people of the town, the play itself seems to count it humiliating for anything to happen. There is endless talk, too literally appropriate for the groping youngsters, which sheds no particular light on their station or future.

It seems fair to complain that the direction does little to distinguish the people as individuals, but the script itself has breathed so little animation into them that opportunities for personal color are rare.

All to Margaret Phillips' credit is the fact that she is able to sustain this wisp of an Alma in a rarely deviating tone through this uneventful crossroads of her life. Certainly it is no fault of hers that the motive of Alma's change of heart is obscure, and that she reveals no promise whatever of success in her chosen life.

Surely plenty of people like this exist, but it is usually lack of choice which determines others to spend an evening with them.

Given some chance to enliven his personable air, Tod Andrews should be a most agreeable young actor. Here he can be little more than obstinate and embarrassed by turns.

So ordinary are these people, and so intangible their significance, that the play comes out in performance more like Nirvana and ectoplasm than even summer and smoke.

Daily Mirror

OCTOBER 7, 1948

'Summer and Smoke' Has A Searching Eloquence

By ROBERT COLEMAN

If you want to know how the unfortunate teacher in "A Streetcar Named Desire" got that way, you should see Tennessee Williams' new and prefatory play, "Summer and Smoke," which arrived at the Music Box Theatre last evening. It has been given a superlative production by Margo Jones.

"Summer and Smoke" is reminiscent of Anatole France's "Thais," in reverse. Williams presents the case of a smalltown singing teacher, and minister's daughter, who, in reclaiming the soul of a profligate and materialistic young doctor, loses her own.

Williams has no peer among modern dramatists at creating a mood. In "Summer and Smoke," he not only has achieved mood beautifully, but beyond any previous attempt, has probed human values. Though this is a verbose play, its verbosity is eloquent, searching and moving.

Heretofore, Williams has concerned himself with useless and shiftless people. Now he offers characters of depth, worth saving, and it is tragic that he couldn't save them all. But the essence of true tragedy is the downfall of characters whom the optimist would destine for a better fate.

Though "Summer and Smoke" may prove less popular than previous Williams' works, it is in our opinion, by all odds, his best script. It evidences growth and maturity in one of our finest playwrights.

Miss Jones, in an inspired moment, selected Margaret Phillips for the leading role. That Miss Phillips is a great actress became apparent to us some eight summers ago, when we first saw her in "High Tor" at Maverick Theatre in Woodstock, N. Y. Now, at long last, given a part worthy of her talents, Miss Phillips plays it magnificently.

Under the sensitive direction of Miss Jones, Miss Phillips' performance increases in stature as the evening progresses. It becomes poignantly overwhelming in the second act. We noted many of our neighbors surreptitiously reaching for their handkerchiefs. It was obvious that they, like us, were deeply moved.

There is a fine performance, too, by Todd Andrews as the errant young doctor, restored to usefulness to his community through the idealistic neurotic's sacrifice.

And there are admirable contributions by Arlene McQuade (she already has the touch of greatness), Donald Hastings, Raymond Van Sickle, Marga Ann Deighton, Monica Boyar, Anne Jackson and Betty Greene Little.

Jo Mielziner has designed and lighted an imaginative setting, a welcome relief from the conventional and realistic box sets which have recently dominated our stage, and Paul Bowles has again demonstrated that incidental music can genuinely further the effectiveness of poetic drama.

"Summer and Smoke" thrilled us. We recommend it to intelligent, adult playgoers. It proves for us that our so-called tributary theatre is the real hope of the American theatre.

Winchell says: "Bravo, Margaret Phillips!"

The Sun

OCTOBER 7, 1948

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Fine Acting, Weak Play.

"Summer and Smoke," in which Tennessee Williams combines metaphysics with realism and symbolism, is a rueful and disturbing play that makes its way, gropingly, through two acts and numerous scenes. It brings forth beautiful performances from Margaret Phillips and Tod Andrews, but the total effect is one sharp disappointment. The first performance was given last evening at the Music Box.

Yes, let it be recorded at the outset, "Summer and Smoke" does bear a resemblance to "The Glass Menagerie" and to "A Streetcar Named Desire." But it is not up to the standard of either. It has a certain gallantry and dignity of its own, but it comes through as a blurry and indefinite play, and frequently a quite tedious one.

Tennessee Williams puts his locale in his native Mississippi. He is writing of an idealistic and oversensitive girl, a minister's daughter, who loves a smalltown doctor's son living next door. She is shy and virtuous and she has a mirthless, nervous little laugh. Alma is a neurotic, given to affectations and self-exaltation, and she wants to keep her relationship with the boy—Dr. Johnny they call him—spiritual. But Johnny is realistic and ruffianly and there comes the night at the Casino by the lake when she rejects his proposals and goes home alone.

Things happen in the town of Glorious Hill. Johnny's father is killed, Johnny takes hold of himself and takes on responsibility and respectability. By this time Alma has dropped to a lower plane, coming around his former ways of thinking—and Johnny is engaged to one of her vocal pupils. Alma is facing a bleak and shadowy future as she goes off with a shoe salesman to the Casino beside the lake.

"Summer and Smoke," told to the incidental music of Paul Bowles and played within another of Jo Mielziner's imaginative settings, is an ironic play, one with some scenes of tenderness and beauty, but also one that never takes on any dramatic progression. There are some windy and listless interludes and a certain monotony overtakes the character of Alma Winemiller in her visionary phases and after her descent from her spiritual level.

Margaret Phillips is fascinating in her playing as the confused, tremulous and introspective Alma. There is a captivating performance from Tod Andrews as the unrepressed Johnny, who becomes suddenly high-minded. Marga Ann Deighton makes a pitiful and believable figure as Alma's demented and babbling mother, who eats ice cream cones walking along the street.

Raymond Van Sickle is excellent as the dull clergyman. There are good performances from Anne Jackson, Betty Greene Little and Earl Montgomery, and a tremendously engaging one from Ray Walston, playing the role of the salesman Alma meets in the little park. Margo Jones has given the play intelligent, professional direction.

"Summer and Smoke" is minus the magic of "The Glass Menagerie" and without the drive of "A Streetcar Named Desire." It has many affecting moments, but it is definitely one of Tennessee Williams's lesser achievements.

NEW YORK STAR

OCTOBER 8, 1948

Mr. Williams' Puff of Smoke

By JOHN LARDNER

There is a theory at large, shared by this department, that Mr. Tennessee Williams can write a better play with his left hand than 96.2 per cent of our present-day playwrights can manage with both hands. After a brief spell of brooding, it occurs to me that maybe that is exactly what Mr. Williams has tried to prove with *Summer and Smoke*, which sidled into the Music Box Wednesday night bearing several of the earmarks of left-handed composition.

More likely, though, the job was done right-handed at an early stage of the author's career, before he was ready and rolling. Its current producer and director, Margo Jones, gave it a test in Dallas a year and a half ago, by which time it had probably seen a fair amount of service already in the shirt compartment of Mr. Williams's valise.

• • •

It is an awkward, cluttered play with an atmosphere as murky as that of the Yellow Dog country in Mississippi where its action takes place. It abounds in loose ends, obscure symbols, and unresolved character studies. Yet, for my money, this Dixieland Chekhov cannot write a really bad piece by today's Broadway standards. There

is intelligence and substance and good writing even in *Summer and Smoke*. It falls well short of the level of *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but in common with those plays it shows Mr. Williams's unique ability to create and sustain a mood.

Once again the author studies life in general through his special medium, the flawed womanhood of the south. The leading lady of *Summer and Smoke*, as delicately daffy as any of her predecessors, is a delta clergyman's daughter, repressed, refined, and talkative. (This long, long part is played with resource and stamina by Margaret Phillips, lately of Cwmgwrach, Wales, a town which sounds as though it might repay investigation by Mr. Williams when he gets the time.)

* * *

The girl and her next-door neighbor, a young doctor with a confused mind and moderately coarse instincts (Tod Andrews), represent through a prologue and two long acts a contest of the spirit and the flesh, complicated by the fact that both people are too crippled by their environment to represent anything at all very satisfactorily. They move from time to time toward a union, a reconciliation of the rival elements, but these gestures are futile and foredoomed. In the words of the young lady, "it's as though we called on each other at the same time, and never found each other home."

Though the tale is often lighted suddenly by a good speech or a quick insight, it is, as I said before, sadly vague and congested and full of loose ends. For instance, care is taken to point out that the strapping young woman who finally wins the doctor is the daughter of the town strumpet, a character who hangs around the depot meeting traveling salesmen. For all the bearing this has on the story, she might as well be the daughter of the chairwoman of the W.C.T.U. Other characters are naive and downright silly in conception, like a Mexican temptress who woos the doctor for purposes of social advancement.

There are symbols enough here for several plays—an angel (named Eternity) who lights up during changes of scene, a ring which the preacher's daughter twists on her finger, an anatomy chart in the doctor's office. In the end, the doctor comes to admit that in addition to the tangible organs shown on this chart, there is something else in the makeup of man, something of the spirit, something insubstantial, a puff of smoke. See title. But, as Mr. Williams demonstrates, there is not a hell of a lot he can do about it.

The single complex set, by Jo Mielziner, struck me as a handsome and useful piece of work.

"Private Lives"

The New York Times

OCTOBER 5, 1948

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

After seventeen years, Noel Coward's "Private Lives" is still outrageously amusing. Since virtually the same thing is true of Tallulah Bankhead, the revival which opened at the Plymouth last evening is the funniest item in the season so far. During the last year Miss Bankhead has been trouping it throughout America, which will probably never be the same again. With Donald Cook as leading man in the part Mr. Coward invented, she has now brought it to New York in a silken production and a tempestuous performance. Unpinioned from the two-headed eagle that last seized her in New York, Our Tallulah is in full cry again—no holds barred in Mr. Coward's sinful escapade.

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When he, Gertrude Lawrence, Jill Esmond and Laurence Olivier were skipping through it, "Private Lives" looked like a drawing-room comedy. They clucked at it in a metallic performance, which had the high art of a harlequinade. It was comedy by virtue of the bright-edged insincerity of their swift, dry, biting acting.

When Miss Bankhead puts all her power behind it, "Private Lives" moves closer into the farcical bailiwick. For she turns it into an exuberant acting holiday—bellowing, strutting and mugging, but also looking very rapturous and coquettish when it suits her to. No one can make the transition from high comedy to low comedy quite as impulsively as she can, and always in the interest of a good performance. A phenomenon that has to be taken on her own terms, Miss Bankhead is vastly interesting. She gives "Private Lives" a good shaking up, and the audience, a good going over.

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Nothing about "Private Lives" is more outrageous than its conventional design. In the first scene two honeymoon couples occupy adjoining terrace suites in a French hotel. The groom of one couple used to be married to the bride of the other. Given that situation, almost any journeyman playwright would have completed the comedy the same way Mr. Coward did. But it would be hard to find anyone else who would give it that much giddy extravagance. Mr. Coward is the acknowledged master of spiteful fooling—spite between the characters and also spite towards the normal, responsible world. Among the sardonic delights of "Private Lives" is the cheerful disdain with which the chief egotists dismiss respectability. Mr. Coward has a genius for venomous phrases.

To be fully relished by the unregenerate, they should be spoken by him in person. They are shrill and unreal when he sends them across the footlights. Mr. Cook is an accomplished actor, too. He has style and manner. He plays with lightness and speed. Paired with Miss Bankhead, he plays with more speed than ever before in his life, and, like America, he will probably never be the same again. He cannot simulate the brittle unreality of Mr. Coward's style. The play undergoes a certain transformation into reality on that account, and reality is not flattering to "Private Lives." But on its own terms Mr. Cook's performance could hardly be better. The profligate he plays may not be witty, but he is humorous, sincerely devoted to his own undoing.

As the baffled bride, Barbara Baxley gives an uncommonly spirited and winning performance. She makes a good deal more of a thankless part than William Langford does of the chuckle-headed groom. Therese Quadri, the sole postgraduate of the original performance, is highly amusing as the garrulous and temperamental French maid.

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Under Martin Manulis' direction, the performance is taut and racy, and the third act in particular is shrewdly arranged. Charles Elson, the scene designer, has housed Mr. Coward's evil notion in becoming splendor. To withstand a full-guaged Bankhead performance, the scenery has to be sturdy, also. For Our Tallulah is in top form in an expertly written antic.

"PRIVATE LIVES."

Comedy by Noel Coward; staged by Martin Manulis; settings by Charles Elson; presented by John C. Wilson at the Plymouth Theater, Monday evening, October 4, 1948. The cast:

Sibyl Chase.....Barbara Baxley
Elyot Chase, her husband...Donald Cook
Victor Prynne.....William Langford
Amanda Prynne, his wife.....Tallulah Bankhead
Louise, a maid.....Therese Quadri

Act 1—Synopsis: The terrace of a hotel in Fraance. A summer evening. Act. 2—Amanda's flat in Paris. A few days later. Evening. Act 3—The same. The next morning.

Journal American

OCTOBER 5, 1948

Tallulah's Audience In Joyful Accord

By ROBERT GARLAND

Although "Who's Who in the Theatre" insists that she was born and brought up in Dunceville, Alabama, Tallulah Bankhead is no fool. And that is why she brings her opening audiences with her. Last night, at the Plymouth, Miss Bankhead and her personal congregation were in rapturous accord all evening.

Standing on her Bankhead, she could have spoken the Noel Coward lines and her folks out front would have gone haywire with appreciation. As a matter of truth-telling, that is precisely what she did during her "Private Lives" revival. As she did, her folks out front went haywire with appreciation.

Even during the piece's flat final stanza, her personal congregation remained rapturously in accord. And, at the conclusion of the ceremonies, her folks out front stood in their proper places until Miss Bankhead made her curtain speech and permitted them to cease applauding . . .

Her Broadway opening audience, her New York personal congregation, was better than those of Tulsa, LaCrosse, Pueblo or even Cedar Rapids. That is what Tallulah Bankhead told them. And I could well believe it. Never in all my theatregoing nights

have I seen a finer performance out in an auditorium.

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How pleasant it would be to say the same about the performance up on the rostrum! But, alas, Mr. Coward's resuscitated comedy of bad manners lends itself to no such superior histrionics. It, as a piece for modern players, is as out-moded as the phonograph records Amanda Prynne breaks over Elyot Chase's head.

I remember finding it high-toned and hilarious when, in the January of 1931, Gertrude Lawrence, Laurence Olivier and Mr. Coward played it for more than it was worth at the Times Square Theatre. But when, three months later, they deserted it, the tone decreased, the hilarity weakened.

That was the period of "Elizabeth the Queen," "Tomorrow and Tomorrow" and "Once in a Lifetime," "Green Grows the Lilacs," "As Husbands Go" and "Five Star Final," "Alison's House," "The Barretts of Wimpole Street" and "Grand Hotel." And Burns Mantle failed to mention it as a "best play" of the season.

Something of a prophet, the late Mr. Mantle! So, even with the original performers and without Tallulah Bankhead's personal congregation, I doubt if anybody could make "Private Lives" come to life today or cause it to seem high-toned and hilarious to the most mistaken drama critic.

Pulls Out the Stops

In the role of Amanda, originated here by Gertrude Lawrence and taken over by Madge Kennedy, Tallulah Bankhead pulls out every stop in the actorial arts. She, as I have stated, stands on her Bankhead and speaks the Noel Coward lines. She over-acts, she under-acts, she is acutely arch about it.

But, unless you are one of her folks out front, a member of her personal congregation, you admire her acute activity, along with her new clothes by Bergdorf Goodman and her new coiffure by Elizabeth Arden. But you do not applaud them. They are not exactly what you came to see.

As Elyot, originated here by Noel Coward and taken over by Otto Kruger, Donald Cook follows in Miss Bankhead's over-acting, under-acting footsteps. So arch is he, so bountifully Bankheadian, that there are moments when, as they break out together, it is hard to tell one from the other . . .

In spite of this, because of it, maybe, Tallulah Bankhead and her personal congregation were in rapturous accord last evening at the Plymouth. So who am I, an envious outsider, to report that "Private Lives" is, to me, as anachronistic, as unfunny and as dated as, say, Noel Coward?

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

OCTOBER 5, 1948

By **OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.**

Return of Old Favorites

TALLULAH BANKHEAD leaps through Noel Coward's "Private Lives" at the Plymouth in a curious and often extremely funny test of theatrical strength. The question of which is the more powerful — Miss Bankhead or Coward's farce—is never very much in doubt in this John C. Wilson revival. Being a brittle thing, the play breaks down easily; and there remains the vision of its star mewing like a kitten and roaring like a lion in a defiant one-woman show. All in all, this is a fortunate state of affairs for every one on both sides of the footlights. Coward's romantic witticisms might or might not stand up in the glare of the post-war theater, but Miss Bankhead's demonstration is very definitely a striking and amusing display of fireworks.

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From the very beginning the star strides into the part of Amanda with tremendous gusto. As she overwhelms her new husband, Victor, in the Deauville scene; sidles into an affair with her ex-husband who himself is honeymooning in the next apartment, and rushes off with him to a delightfully scarlet week in Paris, she clearly establishes that the dry vintage taste of this product of the late twenties will be flavored with the boisterous. In her romps with her ex-husband, Elyot, on the sofa, and in the recrimination scenes at the end, Miss Bankhead demonstrates that much of Coward's flickering dialogue can be rounded into husky, full-throated gags. This version of "Private Lives" may have lost much as a fencing match between two witty and unusual lovers. It gains enough as a circus to earn a place among the present collection of light entertainment.

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As Elyot, Donald Cook is an ideal partner in this venture. Sometimes he is a sardonic straight man for Amanda, and at other times he throws her into relief and dominates her with an icy restraint. Miss Bankhead is a robust figure in this antic romance, and she cannot help occasionally burlesquing the character of Amanda, the play itself and her own performance in it. The brief vignettes of self-satire are amusing, and Cook is always there to bring the whole thing back to its proper level. Elyot and Amanda being clever about Tunis and throwing furniture between kisses might not have seemed quite so much alive without Cook and Miss Bankhead standing in their shoes.

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The role of Sybil, Elyot's wide-eyed, designedly feminine second wife, is taken very well by Barbara Baxley in a most promising Broadway debut. The brief part of the French maid is played by Therese Quadri, who created it in Noel Coward's original production here, and William Langford appears as Victor, Amanda's second husband. The staging, credited to Martin Manulis, is perfectly suited to what developed into a comic acrobatic act costumed in remnants of wit. The question of whether or not "Private Lives" stands up well after all these years is not answered at the Plymouth, but the show finds Miss Bankhead standing up handsomely.

New York Post

OCTOBER 5, 1948.

Tallulah Bankhead Aids New Coward Revival

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

Noel Coward's "Private Lives" is a kind of theatrical tightrope, stretched high and perilously across nothingness, and playwright and actors must move back and forth on it and balance themselves with great care and brilliance, lest they tumble down into oblivion. Since Mr. Coward has a notable skill at constructing tighropes and Tallulah Bankhead and Donald Cook have fine deftness at performing on one, the revival of the famous comedy, which opened at the Plymouth last night, is frequently an entertaining balancing act. But there are also times when one is chiefly aware of the vast void underneath the performers.

Escaping from my metaphor as debonairly as possible, I should add that there can be no doubt about Mr. Coward's ability to make a lot out of virtually nothing. There is equally little question about Miss Bankhead's capacity for giving a fascinating one-woman show. Because, in addition, Mr. Cook is an excellent light comedian and, in one of the subordinate roles, Barbara Baxley succeeds in being much more alive than the part she plays, the current revival is, more often than not, good fun. On the other hand, there are many empty spaces when the slenderness of the play is too evident for comfort.

Things are decidedly at their best when Miss Bankhead and Mr. Cook, as the temperamental lovers, are snarling at each other in their most charmingly acid fashion. When Miss Bankhead is raging ferociously, she is incomparable, and she gives the proceedings the benefit of that superb vitality of hers. The fact that she can be pretty fierce in some of her tenderer scenes also adds to the evening's gayety, since those are the episodes in particular need of enlivening. In fact, it is only when the actors are not in combat that the doldrums descend upon what is really an overextended one-act play.

For most of the frailties of "Private Lives" time, rather than Mr. Coward, is chiefly to blame. For one thing there is the fame of his comedy. When Mr. Cook proclaims that "some women should be struck regularly, like gongs" or describes his travels in foreign parts, the only trouble is that the lines have been so widely quoted that their freshness has departed. The damage wrought by the years is, however, deeper than that. Perhaps we are less frivolous than we were in the thirties, because, when the hero sneers at the "futile moralists" who take things seriously, it is he, not they, who seems out of date.

The melancholy truth is that this is a bad time for the plays of Mr. Coward. They are actually valuable social comedies, which have important comment to make on the vital between-wars period in British annals. Eventually, done in the costumes of their day, they are likely to occupy a place in dramatic writing not infinitely inferior to the works of Wilde and Congreve. At the moment, though, they are a little too prewar to be contemporary in flavor and not old enough to have acquired the standing of period pieces. All of their weaknesses and little of their strength are currently visible.

Today they may seem slender, brittle and a little unfeeling, but they do have style, wit and even a wry sort of truth. There is a lot that is charming about "Private Lives." As for Miss Bankhead, she is always a delight to watch, and that air of excitement and glamor—that much misused word—which she brings to the theatre is a quality that it too rarely possesses in this rather humdrum day through which it is passing. She and Mr. Cook do heroic service for the celebrated comedy and for Mr. Coward, and if the results are not consistently happy, let's blame it on this earnest and bewildered age.

DAILY NEWS

OCTOBER 5, 1948

Tallulah Bankhead Makes Revival Of 'Private Lives' a Public Affair

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Miss Bankhead, who has more tricks—and better—than a Broadway magic shop, romped on a sofa with and argued with Donald Cook last evening at the Plymouth in a revival of Noel Coward's 1931 College Humor comedy, "Private Lives." Miss Bankhead has a good time. I had a good time. And if Mr. Cook wasn't having a good time he is underdeveloped.

"Private Lives" is a tour de force which had sophisticates chattering when Mr. Coward and Gertrude Lawrence first played it here. It was, one said, slight and brittle, and in other than expert hands it wouldn't be much. The same can be said today—but the swivel-necked Mr. Cook and the hag-voiced Miss Bankhead struck me as experts.

Her Clothes Help.

Gracious, what a voice that woman has! It's a baritone, mostly—but with it she can wheedle and simper and entice, as well as bellow. Last evening she was wheedling and bellowing all the time, with a moment snatched here and there for enticement. As I watched her I wondered how it was that she missed in the role of Cleopatra.

Talking is not the only Bankhead trick. She can, for instance, wear clothes very well, and in "Private Lives" she has some very trig outfits. She also can make her clothing work for her. Tossing a scarf over a terrace railing becomes important business; draping the lower folds of negligee pajamas and what is in them gracefully about a sofa, or knowing when to show merely a shoe-tip or an ankle or the whole blooming leg—these are some of the masterful Bankhead chicaneries.

The Enduring Cook.

Mr. Coward's comedy is just as slight and just as brittle as it ever was—and surprisingly durable. The plot: Mr. Cook and Miss B., having divorced on the grounds of violent incompatibility, marry a dull young woman and a dull young man, respectively. On their new honeymoons they take adjoining suites overlooking the Riviera Mediterranean, where all good Molnar and Coward characters live. They meet again and fall incompatibly in love again. Mr. Coward makes it nice and pat by having the two younger people also fall in love.

Some of the smart talk is dated—but not too much of it. Mostly it is rather immortally artificial, as though Mr. Coward might become known as the Richard Brinsley Sheridan of the 20th Century. And a great deal of it is surprisingly human.

One of Miss Bankhead's new tricks is to stop between two syllables of a word to kiss Mr. Cook, and to go right on talking after she has finished this high-octane benison as if nothing had happened. Mr. Cook is quite durable—and very good in Mr. Coward's role. It takes a durable and good comedian to make himself heard and seen when tempestuous Tallulah is in the vicinity.

Very nice, too, are Barbara Baxley and William Langford as the unfortunates who have married such a pair of exhibitionists. Martin Manulis has staged the comedy briskly, and Charles Elson's two settings are attractive. The one really dated and corny element of Mr. Coward's little comedy is the stock French maid, who comes in, shouts French for a few moments and then rushes off amid Gallic imprecations, just for a laugh. Nobody has maids any more, let alone French ones who say "Mon Dieu" and "Oo, la-la!"

NEW YORK STAR

OCTOBER 6, 1948

Bleats, Whinnies, Seal-Barks, Gutturals..

By John Lardner

The air rang with zoological sounds and the stage shook with acrobatic concussions Monday night when Tallulah Bankhead and Donald Cook opened at the Plymouth in their yankee-doodle imitation of Gertrude Lawrence and Noel Coward in *Private Lives*, by Mr. Coward.

It was nearly 18 years ago that *Private Lives* made its first appearance in America, with the author and Miss Lawrence in the leading roles. Looking it over this year with a mind to reviving it, Miss Bankhead and Mr. Cook seem to have sensed in the vehicle, like a man jumping 40 floors into a paper hoop, a certain frailty, an undefinable thinness. It was this feeling, I judge, which led them to burlesque the play, in self-defense.

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The results are curious and not without scientific interest. Mr. Cook is a plain, wholesome fellow from Oregon. Miss Bankhead is a robust siren from the chitling country. They are not exactly the people Mr. Coward had in mind when he wrote the play, which is a kind of upper-class Punch-and-Judy number, full of genteel slapstick and the quiet intoxication of one character with the other's wit. Making like a pair of Mayfair butterflies, Miss Bankhead and Mr. Cook manage, while keeping Lawrence and Coward steadily in their sights, to remain strictly cornfed. That is supposed to be brandy on the table in the second act, but it has the effect of bourbon.

A lady in the audience, who knows her way around the barber shops, told me that Miss Bankhead has her hair cut like Miss Lawrence's. Mr. Cook is made up, seemingly, to look like Mr. Coward. He delivered his lines in a series of bleats and whinnies. Miss Bankhead alternates between seal barks and low-pitched gutturals. If I did not know her to be a Giant fan, I would say she has based her interpretation of the sophisticated Amanda partly on Miss Lawrence and partly on Hilda Chester, formerly the most impassioned lady supporter of the Brooklyn Dodgers.

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Miss Lawrence, you may remember, was a pretty fair acrobat in this part, but Miss Bankhead is far more vigorous and resilient. Those who watched her fall dead down a flight of stairs in *The Eagle Has Two Heads* (a malicious rumor has it that she fell only two or three steps after the first night, but they were good, high steps, just the same) will not be surprised by the grace and power with which she rolls off a couch and wrestles Mr. Cook to a fall with a hammerlock and body scissors at the second act curtain.

Miss Bankhead and Mr. Cook rely on two facial expressions throughout the play, which is all that *Private Lives* calls for. To register pleasure or amusement, they bare their teeth. To show anger or surprise, they open their eyes as wide as possible. While Mr. Coward's story seems to suggest that a happy life, married or sinful, for characters like his consists in trading wise cracks, dead pan, over the supper table, Miss Bankhead and Mr. Cook reward each other frankly with yaks and cheers when they say something funny.

* * *

What the leading players have done here, in the new production by John C. Wilson, is present the same kind of stylized parody that the Gielgud company offered a couple of seasons ago in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. If the *Private Lives* revival is less successful than the Gielgud show, it's chiefly because Mr. Wilde had a little edge over Mr. Coward as an artist, wit, and provider of source material. Miss Bankhead and Mr. Cook are loud, skillful kidders, and in their homespun way they provide entertainment at least as good as any you will find at the Danbury Fair, up the road.

I won't describe the plot of *Private Lives* here, since it has none to speak of. As the two respectable stooges who bring the two divorced wits together again, Barbara Baxley and William Langford do nicely in their Broadway debuts. There is some incidental Coward music in the play, which Miss Bankhead and Mr. Cook have no hesitation in singing, and right on key, at that.